

SENATE RESOLUTION 94
By McLeary

A RESOLUTION to honor and commend Emmett Ledbetter for the belated award of the Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism and meritorious service while a flight engineer and top turret gunner in World War II.

WHEREAS, our nation was conceived by individuals who were willing to sacrifice their personal safety and concerns to ensure our individual and collective freedom, and the Volunteer State is especially proud to be the home of so many valiant men and women who have performed above and beyond the call of duty; and

WHEREAS, many of our citizens served during World War II, and thousands of Tennesseans are continuing this time-honored tradition of volunteerism through service in United States Military Forces today; and

WHEREAS, T/Sgt Emmett Ledbetter, a flight engineer and top turret gunner in the 455th Bomb Group (H), 743rd Bomb Squadron, 15th Air Force based at an airfield near Cerignola, Italy, flew 50 combat missions from February 12, 1944 through June 26, 1944; the majority of those flights were made before D-Day, June 6, 1944, at a time when Germany was not lacking in fighter planes and experienced pilots; and

WHEREAS, only four or five of the original 16 crew of the 743rd Squadron completed their 50 missions; during T/Sgt Ledbetter's tour of duty, the 455th Bomb Groups lost 37 B-24s in combat; and

WHEREAS, about sixty percent of the original group made approximately four missions against the Axis oilfields in Ploesti, Romania, where 930 heavy bombers were lost in the massive raids; and

WHEREAS, T/Sgt Ledbetter was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation twice - the first for an April 2, 1944 mission to Steyr, Austria, and the second for a June 26, 1944 mission to Moosbierbaum, Austria; he also received the Air Medal with six oak leaf clusters and the EAME Theater Ribbon with three battle stars, and was credited with destroying an ME 109 fighter on April 2, 1944; and

WHEREAS, on June 16, 1944, after completing a mission to Vienna, Austria, T/Sgt Ledbetter's crew discovered that one of their bombs had not dropped, the rear of the bomb being held by the back of the bomb rack while the front of the bomb had been released off the rack; T/Sgt Ledbetter and S/Sgt Reid B. Peck, ball turret gunner, put on portable oxygen masks to attack the problem, as they were flying above 20,000 feet; and

WHEREAS, T/Sgt Ledbetter opened the bomb bay doors, and he and S/Sgt Peck walked out on a narrow catwalk; the two men were able to use tools to force the rear of the bomb rack to release the bomb; and

WHEREAS, upon his return from the mission, T/Sgt Ledbetter was debriefed and was told that a recommendation for the Distinguished Flying Cross would be forwarded to the squadron commander; either the paperwork was never submitted, or it was lost for over half a century; and

WHEREAS, through the assistance of Congressman John Tanner's staff, especially Chris Berry, Legislative Assistant, and Vickie Walling, Chief of Staff, Emmett Ledbetter was finally awarded his Distinguished Flying cross on February 13, 2003 - almost 60 years after the event; and

WHEREAS, ever modest about his outstanding service, Mr. Ledbetter said, "I never considered myself a hero. I was a member of a team doing what I was trained to do. The real heroes are the men who gave their lives."; and

WHEREAS, Emmett Ledbetter served his country in time of war with extraordinary courage and great gallantry and deserves proper recognition for his heroism; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, that we hereby honor and commend Emmett Ledbetter of Jackson for his valor, gallantry, and outstanding service as a flight engineer and top turret gunner in the Air Force during combat in World War II.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we congratulate him upon his belated and much-deserved receipt of the Distinguished Flying Cross and offer our profound thanks for his sacrifice and courage and that of his crewmates in defense of our liberty and way of life.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.